

Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda 2026

Introduction

This eleventh annual Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda, convened by Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, reflects the input of over 60 Community Champion members. These organizations, coalitions, and individuals are committed to improving the lives of our keiki by advancing public policy changes that benefit children's health, safety, education, and economic security.

The Agenda contains 11 priorities for the 2026 Hawai'i State Legislative Session. These are the top priority issues of our Community Champion members.

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! (HCAN Speaks!) is a nonpartisan 501(c)4 nonprofit. Our movement is fighting to ensure all keiki are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. HCAN Speaks! gives Hawai'i parents and families the tools needed to make informed voting decisions, hold leaders accountable, and change systems and policies.

HCAN Speaks! respects the diversity, expertise, perspectives, and priorities within this community of advocates and is honored to advance the work of our peers in children's advocacy. HCAN Speaks! supports all of the items in the Agenda. Each initiative lists a lead organization that serves as the primary point of contact for advocacy.

View the Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda online: speaks.hawaii-can.org/agenda2026.

Child Safety and Welfare

E-Bike Regulations for Keiki (HB1564) (SB2680)

Current law lacks clear age, helmet, and supervision requirements for youth operating e-bikes. These high-speed devices have led to rising safety concerns and conflicts on sidewalks and roads. This bill would update laws for electric bicycles and micro-mobility devices; establish age, helmet, and sidewalk-use requirements for different classes of e-bikes and scooters; and restrict the use of e-bikes and mopeds in certain areas.

Lead: Hawai'i Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Legal Counsel for Foster Care Youth (HB1565) (SB2678)

Hawai'i is 1 of 13 states where foster youth do not have the right to an attorney in their court cases. Our youth deserve more. They deserve to be heard in decisions about their lives, their families, and their futures. This bill creates a working group to advance foster youths' access to legal representation, to ensure youth are included in decisions and that their rights are upheld in their cases. Youth with lawyers have better outcomes, including 40% more likely to exit the foster system within 6 months, 45% more likely to reunify with biological parents, and 65% fewer unnecessary school moves.

Lead: HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative

Economic Security and Equity for Children

Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit Fix (HB2007) (SB2683)

With the average cost of preschool in Hawai'i over \$13,000 per year, our working families need more help with their child care expenses. In 2023 our lawmakers took an important first step to boost the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) by quadrupling the maximum *amount* that taxpayers can claim for child and dependent care expenses. But there's also a cap on the *percent* of care expenses that can be claimed with the CDCTC, and that percent is so low that it is nearly impossible for families to access the new higher CDCTC amounts that were passed in 2023. This bill would increase the CDCTC percent cap, allowing working families to get more badly-needed help with their child care costs.

Lead: HCAN Speaks!

Free Public Bus Access for Youth (HB1879) (SB2726)

Public transit is more than a way to get from place to place—it's a tool for growth, opportunity and community connection. Transit is particularly important for young people – the largest demographic of residents who do not drive. When young people can move freely, they gain confidence, independence, and access to the full range of opportunities the islands offer — including school, after-school programs, internships, health care, and recreation. This bill would create a pilot program for residents age 18 and under to access year-round, fare-free public transit access across the state.

Lead: Hawai'i Appleseed

Tax Credit for Diapers (HB2214)

Nearly 1 in 2 U.S. families struggle to afford enough diapers, leading to missed work and lost wages. 1 in 4 parents with diaper need report missing about 5 workdays per month because they didn't have enough diapers to drop their child off at childcare. Lack of diapers increases health risks for infants, including infections and medical complications. Hawai'i families spend over \$1,000 annually on diapers, for some families, that's 14% of their after-tax income. This bill would establish a state tax credit for the purchase of diapers, similar to the existing tax credit for the purchase of car seats.

Lead: Hawai'i Diaper Bank

Youth Housing Stability Assistance Program (HB2167)

This bill establishes a two-year Youth Housing Stability Assistance Pilot Program within the Department of Human Services' Office of Youth Services to provide flexible, rapid financial support to young adults experiencing housing instability or who are at imminent risk of homelessness. The pilot would fund nonprofit organizations and government agencies to deliver one-time assistance of up to \$10,000 to eligible youth ages 18–25 who have experienced a qualifying adverse life event—such as homelessness, exiting foster care, domestic or family violence, trafficking—or who are facing immediate housing loss, including eviction. Funds are designed to quickly stabilize a housing crisis and may be used for rent, deposits, utilities, transportation, food, childcare, and other basic needs. Assistance is youth-centered, disbursed within 24–48 hours when possible, and does not require ongoing service participation beyond a housing stabilization conversation.

Lead: O'ahu Youth Action Board

Health and Wellness for Children

Restore County Authority to Regulate Tobacco (HB1563) (SB2681)

On average, 1,400 people die every year in Hawai'i from a tobacco-related illness, making it the leading cause of preventable death in the state. 95% of tobacco smokers start before the age of 21. Allowing the counties to regulate the sale of tobacco again will empower them to pass innovative policies that reduce the burden of tobacco in their community. Some of the most successful policies, such as smoke free air and minimum age laws, originated at the county level.

Lead: Hawai'i Public Health Institute

Mental Health Digital Platforms (HB1562) (SB2679)

This bill would improve access to mental health services and information for youth using a medium where young people are comfortable. Less than half of the youth who need mental health services are receiving help, according to the Department of Health. Increasing funding for mental health services is a priority recommendation from young people who attended the most recent Hawai'i Children and Youth Summit.

Lead: Representative Gregg Takayama

Pre-K to 12 Education

Free School Meals for Charter Students (HB1561) (SB2677)

This bill would extend free school meals to all charter school students under 300% of the federal poverty level. This would build upon the passage of the law that passed last session providing the same for public school students. Right now, the free school meals expansion only applies to public school students, while charter schools, which largely serve rural areas of the state and Native Hawaiians, are not able to benefit.

Lead: Hawai'i Appleseed

Community Schools (HB1896)

Community schools are a proven school improvement strategy that helps schools align and leverage existing resources and partnerships to address barriers to learning and support the whole child and whole family—academics, attendance, well-being, belonging, cultural identity, and connection to 'āina. The strategy is built on reciprocal relationships and inclusive decision-making, recognizing students and families not only as recipients of services but as valued contributors, leaders, and co-designers of solutions that strengthen the entire school community.

Lead: Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance

Constitutional Amendment on Property Tax to Fund Education (HB2147) (SB2464)

Hawai'i ranks among the lowest of states in percentage of state and local expenditures supporting K–12 education—15.1% compared to U.S. average 21.5%, leading to chronic underfunding of public schools. This underfunding results in deteriorating facilities, low teacher pay, and inadequate programs and resources. This bill proposes amendments to the Hawai'i State Constitution to authorize the Legislature to tax certain residential investment properties, for the purpose of helping to fund public education.

Lead: Representative Amy Perruso

Community Champion Members

Organizations

AlohaCare
Catalight Foundation
EPIC 'Ohana
Hālau Hula o Nāmamoakeakua
Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
Hawai'i Appleseed
Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists
Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!
Hawai'i Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Hawai'i Coalition for Child Protective Reform
Hawai'i Dental Service
Hawai'i Diaper Bank
Hawai'i Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
Hawai'i Families as Allies (HFAA)
Hawai'i Public Health Institute
Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities
Hawai'i State PTSA
Hawai'i State Teachers Association
Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board
Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition
Hawai'i Youth Services Network
Ho'oikaika Partnership
ISR O'ahu
National Center for Youth Law (Hawai'i office)
Office of Councilmember Johnson
Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation
Paid Leave Hawai'i Coalition
Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i
Protective Makua
Puakalehua Early Learning Consortium
RAI Hawai'i
The Green Preschool Kailua
The Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center

Individuals

Paula Adams	Leilani Kupahu-Marino Kahoano	Quin Ogawa	Todd Taniguchi
Deborah Bond-Upson	Nina Ki	Amy Perruso	Jessica Wong-Sumida
Paris Burton	Caitlin Kryss	Robert Peters	Karen Worthington
Reid Chung	Terry Lock	Dana Senaha	Erica Yamauchi
Regina Corniel	Deb Marois	Jeannine Souki	
Sarah Fairchild	Maluhia ODonnell	Mariailiana Stark	
Jackie Jackson	Susie Chun Oakland	Anna Stone	

Take action today

Become a Community Champion member - speaks.hawaii-can.org/communitychampions

You'll get exclusive advocacy tools, including custom action alerts, bill tracking, briefings on legislative hearings, sample testimony, media assistance, policy research, breaking news concerning children's issues, explanations of legislative/regulatory activity, and more.

Sign up for free legislative action alerts - speaks.hawaii-can.org/updates

Anyone interested in children's issues at the Legislature can sign up for action alerts on important bills. Your voice is needed — and we make it easy to get involved with our simple advocacy tools.

Donate to this grassroots movement - speaks.hawaii-can.org/donate_to_hcan_speaks

We can only advance the important initiatives in this Agenda with your support. Your gift today will help to address the root causes of poverty and inequity and develop these crucial public policies for our keiki.

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! (HCAN Speaks!) - speaks.hawaii-can.org

HCAN Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501(c)4 nonprofit working to ensure all keiki are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. We give Hawai'i residents the tools they need to change systems and policies, hold leaders accountable, and make informed voting decisions.

We are honored to be the convener and coordinator of the pro-keiki organizations, coalitions, and individuals who participated in this Agenda.



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